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A Single Decision (Take Two)

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Aboard Invisible Hand, on that fateful day above Coruscant, Grievous makes a choice that causes a few little changes for the Separatists and Republic alike. [rewrite of a much older story]

Rated: Fiction T (https://www.fictionratings.com/) - English - Sci-Fi/Friendship - General Grievous, OC - Chapters: 53 - Words: 542,002 - Reviews: 1,397 (/r/11714223/) - Favs: 1,321 - Follows: 1,431 - Updated: Aug 19, 2022 - Published: Jan 4, 2016 - id: 11714223

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Chapter 4

< Prev 4. Chapter 4: Turning Points Next >

"I have a mission for you, crab-man." Grievous's hologram said. "I hope you are up for it."

"Where you command, I will go, sir." said Kronaak. He was stuck in his shuttle, just like half of the other officers who had come down to Utapau for a well-earned break, only for their General to wake them up in the middle of their first night off for a new campaign. The narrow confines of the sinkhole meant only a few ships could safely leave at a time, and despite being a battleship's captain, Kronaak was still low in departure priority.

"Good." The cyborg clasped his hands together behind his back; a habitual stance everyone in the Confederate Navy had come to recognize. "Our stronghold of Sluis Van is succumbing to starvation. The Khedive of the serpents has asked me to break the blockade of his world so that his people do not all die in the next month. Apparently the serpents are vital to our war-effort."

"The Sluissi are excellent mechanics and engineers, sir." Kronaak agreed. "It would be a harsh blow to lose their aid."

"As much as I would like to just evacuate the vital personnel for future use, my advisers tell me that it would be wiser to save the entire planet's population, even the useless civilians." Grievous did not hide the annoyance in his voice.

"Mechanics and engineers tend to have families, sir. And people as a whole tend to fight better when they have something to fight for."

"I did not ask for your opinion, crab-man." growled the cyborg, before coughing. "I need you to take your squadron and... hmmm, *requisition* what food supplies in this region you can. Enough to provide relief until regular shipments can resume."

"It can be done, sir." Kronaak nodded. Ahead of him, someone's very prestigious *Theta*-class shuttle lifted off. His *Sheathipede* would be next. "Give me a week-"

"You have two days, Captain." If he had a mouth, Grievous would have been smiling, Kronaak knew it.

"Two days-?!"

"Will there be a problem? Or should I give this task to one of my Nemoidians? They have a nose for timely thrift..."

"I will meet you at Sluis Van in two days, sir, with the goods." Kronaak saluted again, and Grievous cut off the hologram. Immediately, he rang up *Aethra*. "27, we have a new mission."

"Yes, Captain?" answered OOM-27, his battle-droid second.

"Locate all inhabitances in this region that trade in whatever foods Sluissi eat. Anything will do."

"Roger roger." 27 said.

Kronaak clicked his claws, and adjusted the insulating robes his people wore while out of water. "We have two days to gather enough to feed a whole planet. We must be prompt about this."

OOM-27 nodded. "So, terminologically speaking, we're doing a food run for General Grievous?"

"Yes, you could say that."

The shuttle was finally given clearance to leave, and they soared up back into orbit. *I wonder who owned that Theta?* Kronaak thought, as his pilot droids guided them back to *Aethra*. The *Theta* was generally found in the ownership of Republic senators, not Separatist officers. He'd need to look into that.

It took less time to reach his ship than it did to get out of the hangar. Kronaak's shuttle touched down in one of the central sphere's personal hangars, and he made quick time up to the bridge tower.

"Everything is still in order?" he asked, upon arriving on the bridge.

"Yes, sir." reported OOM-27. As far as battle-droids went, 27 was ancient. Pure luck had saved him from the scrap pile after the Naboo incident thirteen years ago, then he'd endured a decade of security work on a Techno Union remote mining facility, before finally getting caught in the chaos of Geonosis and managing to stumble aboard coreship Kronaak served on, along with a hundred thousand other retreating droids. That coreship had been, of course, *Aethra*, and in the last three years, Kronaak had been running an experiment on his droids: he'd never once wiped 27's memory, nor the memories of any other droids in his service.

The results were mildly competent battle-droids, the horrid post-Geonosis software "update" being negated by learned experience. Kronaak was sure the war would have been won by now if Count Dooku hadn't been forced to bow to the whims of those money-grubbers who provided the droids...

"No reactor leaks? No broken conduits? No missing Vulture droids?" he asked, every step of his clicking on the smooth, hard floor of the bridge.

"No, sir." said 27. "Everything is accounted for."

"And our lovely ladies?" Kronaak went on. 27 brought up a holographic display of *Aethra* and her encircling escort of six *Recusant* destroyers. None of them had a crew beyond maintenance droids, their outer shells were smooth and devoid of the features that the crewed *Recusants* had.

"*Charonia*, *Maira*, and *Hurricane* report only superficial damage. *Tempest* reports a hypermatter leak that is under control. *Moonraker* reports seventy-seven percent hull integrity, and burst plasma relays. *Ardent* reports eight overloaded turbolaser capacitors, a shattered comms dish, and no power from the auxiliary reactor. Repairs are still underway." The damaged ships glowed red on the display.

"I'm surprised they got off so lightly." Kronaak said. His droid-brained *Recusants* had been acquired over the course of the war; some by assignment, some he had just taken for his own. None of them had names until Kronaak had given them that gift.

"Ours seem to be learning, sir." said 27. "I noticed a destroyer from another group crashing into one of our own frigates over Coruscant."

"Courtesy of the Commerce Guild, no doubt." He twisted his claws about his walking stick, wishing it was President Shu Mai's neck. Of all the Confederacy's backers, Shu Mai was the worst penny-pincher. "Sometimes I think our leaders meant for us to lose this war, given the droids we have to work with."

"A credit saved is a credit earned, sir." 27 recited, from *Aethra's* Trade Federation-era ship's manual.

"As long as our ladies can still make hyperspace, we will be fine. I doubt we'll run into any Republic presence out here. Recall the patrols and set course for..." Kronaak wasn't quite sure where they were going to go first.

"Elrood is a trade-hub, and on our side." said 27, bringing up a map of the region.

"Set course for Elrood then. After that..." He stared at the map. Askaj would have no food for trade, at least not in the amounts he needed. It was the same for Subterrel. "We'll head to Terminus next."

"That's a good distance away, sir."

"Yes, but it's the closest commercial center to us, other than Elrood. Atravis is under Republic siege, and so is Shumavar... We'll just have to try our luck. Can our escorts keep up?"

"They report ready to jump, sir." said OOM-27, before a pilot droid spoke.

"We've laid in a course for Elrood, Captain."

Kronaak nodded, and pointed his walking stick forward. "Engage."

Esera Komara was far from the first Jedi ever to be captured by enemy forces, but she might have been the first to be captured while in a hospital gown. She wasn't sure if it was luck or not that a human Separatist trooper stopped the commando droids from executing her in the hospital. On one hand, she was alive. On the other... Well, if Aspar ever found out about this, she'd never live it down. And he would find out about this.

The Separatists sent her back in a landspeeder to their headquarters, a hunting lodge high up in the hills south of the city, behind several seemingly-abandoned defensive lines. Spring had come to Shumavar, but there was still snow up here. Force-aided concentration kept the chill off her, but it would still affect her body in time. At least one of the soldiers had given her a coat to wear. "In." a commando droid ordered, in a gruff monotone.

"Didn't you hear her earlier?" asked the human trooper. "Her leg is shot, she can't walk. Get a stretcher."

"Droids." Esera muttered.

"Even we can't stand them, sometimes." the trooper said. The Separatists were very old-fashioned up here, their stretchers were carried, instead of mounted on repulsorlifts. They brought her into the hunting lodge, and placed her near a blazing hearth.

"Who is this?" asked an old bearded man, who was also sitting near the fire. "She's younger than my granddaughter, she can't be a soldier." A desk was before him, and on it, a pile of maps, both holographic displays and drawings on sheets of strange stiff cloth. How primitive!

"I'm a Jedi knight." said Esera. One of the commando droids handed him her lightsaber.

"Well, I'll be..." laughed the old man. "A real Jedi! Right here in my own home! Did my soldiers shoot you?"

"A sniper, yesterday. These ones caught me in the hospital, during this suicidal attack of yours."

"Ah... What is your name, Jedi?"

"Esera Komara." she said, sitting up as best she could.

"You have Risto Tuom, captain of this band of misfits." said the man. "Have no fear, Jedi Komara, you'll be back with your slave army soon enough. You are right, this is a suicidal attack. Consider it our way of paying respects to the late Chancellor Palpatine." Tuom laughed again, and reclined in his chair. "I hope that doesn't cause you too much offense."

"Plenty of us didn't like him either, you know." Esera scowled at him. "The man was an aspiring dictator."

"When you put it that way, I almost wish he weren't dead." said Tuom. "Could have done our cause good if the galaxy saw him for what he was."

"With Palpatine gone, we can begin the return to true democracy. This war need not last much longer. It's not too late to surrender, Captain." If Esera couldn't be a peacekeeper, at least she could be a peacemaker... Or not, as the Separatist would have it.

"Surrender? To you? Hah!" Tuom gave her a wry look. "We are not blind, nor are we deaf. We know what your friends have been up to out there. Looting, pillaging, gas attacks, massacres and executions... No, Jedi, I would not surrender to the Republic. Maybe six months ago, but not now."

Esera sighed. "I *told* them this would happen."

"Sorry to prove you right." The Separatist captain smiled apologetically. "When your militia torched Silverfeld without any consequence more than a stern word, I knew then that this wouldn't be a war I survived. Not that I ever expected to die peacefully, mind you."

"What do you mean?"

"There's been war on this planet for decades, girl. Didn't your intelligence officers brief you?"

"Governor Dorthan has not been forthcoming about everything..." Esera said. "I only know what little I was briefed on and what rumors the clones have told me."

"It's a long story... But I suppose someone should know the truth. The short of it is, my people were the second-comers to this planet. About five hundred years ago, we arrived, and the first-comers welcomed us. There was peace for a while, but when I was your age, things got out of hand. Water rights, land ownership, petty disputes that grew into something more, until it was us versus them." Tuom rolled his eyes. "A waste of time, really. It all seems so stupid, that so many have died for so little gain."

"Well, why didn't you ask the Republic for help before it got this bad?" asked Esera.

"You think we didn't? We didn't get an answer. Not even an acknowledgment. We didn't really exist in the eyes of Coruscant bureaucrats, I think. That's just how it goes for us in the Outer Rim. Who cares about Shumavar? Who has even heard of Shumavar? No one in the Core. No one on Coruscant. Things got worse, then Dooku came. Here, to this forgotten backwater. Were we supposed to refuse his offer to make peace? Were we supposed to doom our children to live in unending war? We did what we thought we had to do. Dooku stopped the war here, he made a peace between our peoples, begrudging as it was for our foe." The old man looked at the Confederate roundel embroidered on his clearly home-made uniform. "No one really believed in the Separatist cause until you re-started the war, and the retributions began, you know."

"I've done all I can to hold them back, and I can still do more if you lay down your arms. But you need to trust in the system, this won't continue-" Esera tried to plead, but Tuom cut her off.

"I don't think so. The system failed us before, it'll fail us again. Especially now that our foe has the system's backing. I'd rather die standing than die on my knees." The human trooper nodded in agreement.

"Most of our men decided they'd rather assault your lines directly than die to gas like everyone in Erendel City." the trooper said. "It's a cleaner death."

"Don't they have families?" asked Esera.

"*Did*." Tuom corrected, raising a finger. "I let anyone who still had family break ranks a week ago. We're all locals, Jedi. And when local cities suffer the Loyalist militias, local men feel the effects. That's why we're still here, and not back home pretending we never left."

"Captain Tuom's orders are to give no mercy to the Loyalists. Most of us remaining were from Silverfeld, lady Jedi." The trooper gave her a grim look.

Esera felt what was left of her hopes for a peaceful end crumble like ash. "My mission has failed, then." she said. Somehow, she wasn't surprised. She'd seen this coming from a mile away. But the taste of defeat was bitter nonetheless.

The old captain's expression softened. "It's not your fault, Jedi. There's too much bad blood between us, too many evil deeds. No one is guiltless in this war, not us, not them. When you favored one side over the other... I guarantee you that if you had aligned with us, they would have fought you just as hard as we are now. Peace was never an option after that choice, do not blame yourself for what others have done." He turned to the trooper. "Soldier, you may return to the front, if you like. I'll wait for them."

"Aye, sir. We'll see you on the other side." The man saluted, and departed the way he came.

The Captain sighed. "No more talk of war and sorrow, I say. We've had enough of that, and it'll be over soon enough." said Tuom. "Are you hungry?"

"I am." Esera nodded. "Thank you for your hospitality Captain Tuom, it's more than I expected." Tuom waved at the commando droid, who went off to somewhere else in the lodge.

"An enemy is someone you fight. We are not fighting, I do not consider you an enemy." He picked up her lightsaber, looking at it like a sacred relic. "Never thought I'd hold one of these. Your kind were just legends before you showed up here." He switched it on, and the green blade leaped out. "What an elegant piece of work..." Tuom's gaze swept down the shaft of light, and onto the silver handle. It had been simple and smooth once, but Esera had taken to carving leaf-work into it over the years.

"Please be careful with that." she said, cringing as she remembered a particularly gruesome lightsaber safety training holovid from her youth.

"Here," he said, switching it off, "I doubt you'll have need of it while you're with us anyway."

"Thank you." Esera said again, taking her weapon back.

"Do the colors mean anything?" asked Tuom. "I've seen a blue blade before, on the Holonet once, but not a green one."

"They used to, actually. Blue was for Jedi like Anakin Skywalker, bold warriors and defenders of the Republic. Green was for Jedi who preferred finding a more *peaceful* way to peace... Like Master Yoda." Esera couldn't help but smile a bit at that. "But those distinctions have been all but forgotten these days. I only know because I spent all my time in the archives instead of sparring... I kind of regret it, now."

"In a better world, they'd be the ones feeling foolish." said the Captain. "Well, let's get you comfortable, it'll be a while before your clones make it here. But once you can walk, you're free to go."

Author's note: I wasn't lying about the variable length of chapters. Anyways, during the opening battle of Revenge of the Sith, there are two kinds of Recusants in the background. There's the kind that have a spine of antennas along the back and a protruding bridge above the bow, and there's a kind that just have smooth shells, with no antenna spines or bridge. I know this isn't a production fluke because the two different kinds are shown on screen at the same time in multiple shots, someone made a conscious choice to depict them that way. I choose to believe the more featureless of the two is a completely automated ship, probably designed more for patrols and escort duty than front line combat, where the resourcefulness and improvisational ability of an organic crew wouldn't be worth the cost of wages and supply in the Commerce Guild's eyes. (this is the kind of thing I think about while riding the train to class)

Name:

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